

# Libertarians and Porn

July 21, 2010 by [Grover Cleveland](#)

*Reason* has produced [about 20 posts/articles/tweets](#) just this month on the John Stagliano trial. For those who don't read *Reason's* blog as religiously as I do or who aren't into adult films pornography, Stagliano is a big name in both the porn world and the libertarian world. In terms of the latter, he is a financial supporter of libertarians and libertarian causes, including the Reason Foundation (and in the past he has been a donor to both Ron Paul and the Cato Institute). The reason Stagliano is in the news so much lately is that he faced obscenity charges in Federal court and could have been sentenced to decades of jail time if he had lost. Fortunately, the state failed on all counts and Stagliano is free to live his life as he pleases – which I'm sure he'll do.

On the policy issue, I agree with *Reason's* Jacob Sullum that “no one should be threatened with prison for distributing pornography produced by and for consenting adults.” Individuals might or might not want to watch what Stagliano produces, but everyone should be free to watch, make, produce, and distribute anything that doesn't violate the property rights of others. Indeed, shocker here...I even think bakers should be allowed to work overtime if they so choose (not so random *Lochner* shout out) – and for any wage they agree upon with bakery owners!

But when does covering an admittedly important story go too far? Did *Reason* need to cover it as if it were the trial of the century? When does coverage of a story about principle move into celebration of its star figure and the business he is in? And is Stagliano personally worthy of celebration even if his First Amendment cause is just? I'm not saying *Reason* was wrong in its coverage, but I think these are questions worth thinking about.

And by the way, I'm not that prudish about sexuality. I just think there is a happy medium between prudishness and the celebration of people who while satisfying the preferences of their customers, are not exactly redeemable characters. I'll defend the right of fully-consenting adult sex workers to employ themselves as they see fit but please don't try to tell me that their work is morally equivalent to every other service professional. Or that the cause of pornographers is more important than that of the many, many Americans whose rights are being violated on a continual basis in this country.

So kudos to *Reason* for bringing Stagliano's case to our attention. But let's have some perspective and spend more time reporting on other cases even if they don't generate as many eyeballs to one's site (I would argue that satisfying the demands of readers is only one of the responsibilities of journalism). Moreover, in order for libertarianism to be broadly attractive, we need to break the perception that its adherents are mostly interested in “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.” There are times when some libertarians exemplify rather than defy such stereotypes.